

The Mind's Eye

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The next issue of the Mind's Eye will appear in September.
Contributions are welcome.

The Editor's FileMARGARET MARY TOOLE

Education, that noble enterprise, is defined and celebrated in the lives of its leading practitioners. Last year North Adams State College lost such a one by the death of Margaret Mary Toole--Chaucerian, Shakespearean, and scholar of Irish

literature--who had taught here for twenty years. On April 11 the College bade her a loving farewell in a memorial and dedication ceremony. The following remarks are excerpted from the address of Gearoid O Clerigh, Consul-General of Ireland.

I think we first came to know Margaret Mary at a meeting of the Eire Society. And then she asked me down here and that was one of the extraordinary days of my life. I had spoken with her class, and before my wife and I left that evening--we had our infant son with us and Margaret Mary insisted that he come into the class, and he left with a gold star report--we had begun a deep friendship. We experienced her hospitality numerous times and I saw again the way she was dedicated, not just to learning, but to people, and how she wished to bring things in people alive in them. She was also, besides being self-effacing, a person of quick and ready spirit. I had the effrontery to present her with a copy of my poems in Gaelic and to say that I was certain she wouldn't understand them. She really bridled at this and then I learned that she had studied Irish under Tom Peete Cross; but she wasn't somebody to project her learning unnecessarily, and she had so many wide fields of knowledge that you never knew about or only came upon by accident. . . .

HUMAN RIGHTS AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD THE LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

by Robert Bence

Summary of Part One

In the previous issue of The Mind's Eye I presented the case that our concern for human rights in the Third World should be focused primarily on economic development. Promoting Western-style political freedoms should be a secondary concern for U.S. foreign policy makers. The conclusion of this essay outlines a strategy for a human rights-based foreign policy toward the Third World.

Part Two

While public aid from the U.S. government and from private multinational corporate investment projects may provide a transfer of the necessary development capital, there is little evidence to indicate that our efforts have served to relieve poverty in the less developed countries. A recent World Bank study projected that by the end

of the century the masses of poor (2½ billion or half the world population) will receive less than \$200 annually per capita, and some 800 million of those will benefit by less than \$100. According to United Nations estimates, even in countries that have had significant growth rates the number of poor does not necessarily decrease, but actually increases. For example, in Mexico in the 1950s the richest 20% of the population had ten times the income of the poorest 20%. By the late 1960s the rich had increased their share to seventeen times what the bottom 20% received.

Development is more than the simple transfer of funds and technology. In fact, the problem of development in the poorer countries is not primarily economic, but political and social. It will be necessary in many cases for the less developed nations to institute deep structural changes in their traditional

societies in order to obtain the money, the infrastructure, and the general economic systems they need to reduce starvation and provide adequate housing and health care. These traditional societies overfarm small, uneconomical parcels of land, have restrictive class or caste systems, and contain various ethnic divisions unwilling to abandon parochialism in exchange for more systematic means of production and distribution.

In the past the U.S. has maintained that the introduction of Western technology and limited corporate development would eventually change these societies in an evolutionary, peaceful style, with the added advantage of some immediate "trickle-down" benefits. But development must proceed faster if the next few generations, especially those in rural areas, are going to enjoy the right to live relatively healthy, long lives. Development may require that traditions be severely modified, or in some cases, like the caste system, be completely dismantled. The very foundations of traditional society may have to be shaken, much as the revolutions did in the USSR, China, or Cuba. The Red Guard rampages of the 1960s attest to Chinese youth's rejection of the traditional value of respect for elders.

It is worth noting that economic advancement is always a difficult process. It certainly was in the United States. As Robert Heilbroner outlines the process in his work Between Capitalism and Socialism, industrial development in America meant hardship and often death for workers and their families. But the Western model, which moved too slowly, is not appropriate for the noncomparable conditions in most African and Asian nations.

The most convenient model for rapid development is, of course, communism or some type of socialism. The implementation of this model does not guarantee economic utopia, but by using it, China, for one, has made some significant strides in reducing the economic hardships of its peoples. Obviously there were some serious tradeoffs made in this process. Opposition was suppressed, lives were lost, and families were uprooted. How-

ever, it is necessary to reemphasize the point that major economic changes do not occur smoothly in any country. And if Mao Tse-tung had not been successful, it seems doubtful that the Chinese people would have gained a higher level of human rights of any type.

Now, if economic development requires revolution, what should the position of the United States be toward the developing countries, especially in regard to our newfound concern for human rights?

First, we must develop a more sophisticated view of human rights--one based not solely on our unique experience as an affluent, individualistic, liberal democracy. We need to appreciate that human rights encompasses basic survival needs as well as political freedoms. Vietnam should have provided a vivid lesson in this regard.

Second, we need finally to abandon one of the sacred tenets of our Cold War philosophy--that communism and socialism are always less preferable than other political-economic systems.

Third, concerning policy initiatives, we will have to split some very fine hairs in determining what regimes are most likely to deal effectively with human rights, especially the crucial ones of human survival. It might well be that Cuban troops and technicians in Ethiopia and Angola are necessary to insure the political stability needed to put together a sound economic framework. It is also possible that we should not frown upon antidemocratic developments in countries which--like India--may require more centralized forms of government to resolve their staggering problems of overpopulation and poverty. We should also consider our allegiance to questionable allies like President Mobutu of Zaire, who has allowed a corrupt governmental and economic system to severely retard any kind of development. It seems obvious that we cannot be supporters of totalitarian regimes per se, but we will have to look more closely at the options available to deal with human rights, from simple diplomatic recognition to military and developmental aid.

There are many dangers in making human rights a cornerstone of our foreign policy, not the least of which is that we may get tangled up in a pretentiously moralistic campaign recalling the chauvinistic days of Woodrow Wilson ("We will teach those people to elect good leaders"). But given the high level of economic and military involvement we have in the world already, the decisions our government makes or fails to make will have an effect, even if unintentional, on human rights. We should realize that building a political system that integrates and mobilizes a traditional society may have some nasty side effects that are inconsistent with liberal democracy. Concern for human rights is valid, but it is important that this concern be placed in a broader perspective than that of our own peculiar history.

LIBERAL CAREER EDUCATION IN MICHIGAN

by Michael Haines

Early in April, I attended a National Conference on Education and Vocation at William James College, one of the colleges of the "cluster college" known as the Grand Valley State Colleges, in Allendale, Michigan (near Grand Rapids). The conference was funded as part of an overall study of the program at William James under a grant from the U.S. Office of Education. The basic aim of the conference was to communicate to a national audience the unique program at William James--a program which professes to integrate liberal arts and career education.

William James College was founded in 1971 as one of three experimental colleges at Grand Valley (in addition to their "normal" College of Arts and Sciences and their two graduate programs). One of the experimental schools, Thomas Jefferson College, is based on the English tutorial system--all independent study, no grades, no requirements. The other experimental program, Kirkhof College, is self-paced and competency-based. The fact that the three experiments began in the early 70s is

significant: each program in its own way is a response to the 60s.

William James College is not named by accident: it was founded on the philosophy of its namesake--the American physician, philosopher, teacher, psychologist, and student of comparative religion. As the college notes in its brochure, James "was associated with a pragmatic approach to social, technical, and economic questions; with a pluralistic attitude toward the physical and social sciences he pursued; and with an urbane humanism in his personal life." The goal of James's studies was "action in the world"; likewise, the goal of the college is to reach out into the world, "to enable our graduates to lead personally meaningful lives of action."

The USOE grant which the college received was one of two awarded to study career education in liberal arts colleges. The other award was to Madonna College, a school outside Detroit. The major difference between the two programs is that Madonna's is essentially a career or vocational education program "added on" to a traditional liberal arts program. The curriculum at William James is the "infused model"--an integration of career education and liberal arts. The College says it does not make the "usual distinction between liberal arts education and career education"; instead, it attempts to teach "career-related subjects from a liberal arts perspective and liberal arts subjects from a practical point of view."

How successful are they? That, I am afraid, remains to be seen. The point of the conference was to demonstrate that they are indeed successful. Ironically, however, at just the moment they were trying to communicate this message to the hundred or so invited guests, they found out from the administration at Grand Valley that they were facing imminent retrenchment as a result of declining enrollments and curtailments in state budgets. The situation caused a fair amount of defensiveness on the part of the William James faculty and administration, and this defensiveness coupled with the missionary zeal of past and present

MRS. McELROY

by R. G. Vliet

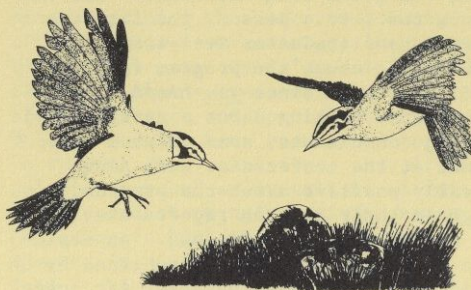
The front room was always closed:
the half-pulled
shades, the listening furniture, old
novels, Latin school Cicero, lace
tea-brown
curtains waiting in the still air.

In the parlor she put another chunk
in the cast
iron stove, then sat in her rocker
with the tatted throw, among heaps
of Christian
Science Sentinels and Monitors, in company

with the pain in her hip, the constant witness
of pain
in her long hand bones: angels
of error she had daily to wrestle with.
She wore
white drawstring cap, long

blue cotton dress with flat
white
collar and white cuffs, black
apron. A cane hung from her chair.
I never saw
the ankles of her cricket-dark shoes.

Her husband had been translated years ago.
A rose-wreathed
saucer sat on the table beside me
with its twice-weekly offering of apple
brown
betty. Before I split the kindling



we visited, she in the loneliness
of dwindling
time, I in the pain of a boy's
eternal present. The slop bucket
conjectured
by the kitchen door. Mrs. McElroy

hobbled through the yard, her cane
touching
this chore and that chore: slops
to be poured, mulch turned, thinning
of a strawberry
bed, tying up of brambles.

Under the mulberries, red stains
and bird
droppings. April, asparagus. Cuttings
of rhubarb thick as my wrist. Raspberries.
Loganberries.
In August I fought starlings for bushels

of bing cherries, fistfuls of damsons
for her tart
jellies. The sun still shines that shone
on her. Since then, my dear, my mother
and my bride,
I have loved the struggling aged.

students who were also a part of the conference made it very difficult to winnow the grain from the chaff. But the fact is that, to a person, the faculty, students, and graduates were incredibly enthusiastic about the program (and how long it has been since you heard faculty and students gushing about a curriculum?). Visiting consultants, some of whom were present at the conference, were also generally positive about the program, though in their written reports they do have some specific criticisms. An evaluation conducted as part of the grant by an outside agency is also positive (at least the summary which I have received--I am still awaiting the full report).

The conference itself had its problems, not the least of which was the coincidence with the college's bad news. It also had the usual problems of conferences involving academics, many of whom seem to have an overweening fondness for the sound of their own voices and to be plagued by a chronic inability to organize talks and/or to get to the point. But, try as they did to hide the important ideas and information, the conference was a valuable experience--at least as a beginning.

I think we can (and must) learn from the attempt to integrate career and liberal arts education. We all know how our students have turned into raging pragmatists and materialists, and we know that, in an age of a shrinking pool of potential students, we must begin to be a bit pragmatic ourselves. But there are those of us who are unwilling--perhaps unable--to let go of the traditional values of the liberal arts. Possibly, just possibly, William James College has some answers for our own expressed concern to integrate career and liberal arts education.

Now, that is not to say that we ought to become a branch campus of William James College. One of the speakers at the conference, Jonathan Smith, a dean at the University of Chicago, suggested that we recognize "institutional particularity." That is, we must recognize, and not fight, the fact that each institution has its own particular history which has made it into what it is: William James could not be a

Chicago any more than Chicago could be a William James. (As I mentioned above, William James is what it is probably as much because it was founded in the early 70s as for any other reason.)

North Adams State College is also what it is because of its history, and there is little likelihood it could become a Chicago or a William James. However, I personally would like to see some dramatic changes in curriculum, and I think the time is ripe. And we can learn from places like William James: not to learn from other institutions could be academic suicide.

One thing which William James has done and which I would like to see North Adams State do is to abolish all departments and offer all its degrees as interdisciplinary, individualized programs. Such a suggestion might be, because of our particular history, an unrealistic expectation, but it is not the first time it has been proposed at this college (several years ago a long-range planning committee offered a similar proposal). If, however, this proposal is too drastic, we can at least continue to build on the foundation of the interdisciplinary program we now have: we can offer a variety of models or clusters of interdisciplinary courses in addition to traditional departmental majors.

Another change we can consider--and here we can learn a lot from William James College--is to think more of relating the liberal arts to the real world, without falling prey to the trap of a contrived "relevance." We can, for one thing, expand our developing cooperative education and internship programs in order to give our students "real world" experience. We can do more to convince them of the value of the liberal arts in a variety of careers (and here we could probably enlist the aid of people from the outside). But we could also afford to look more closely at what William James College and others do in individual courses to integrate the two types of education so that our students do not so readily write off certain offerings as mere ivory tower hurdles to jump over on the way to gradu-

ation. Not to do so could well spell certain death for some of the more traditional courses or departments.

Whatever we do, we must do something soon if we are to survive the shrinking pool of students and the governor's cutthroat policies. I think we must demonstrate the value of what we have done, but I think we must also improve what we are doing. Our way to improve might well be to look more closely at programs like that at William James.

The Literary Scene

THE PRISM OF TIME

"Old Creole Days in the Big Easy"

By Robert Bishoff

"What Ever Happened to the Ethnic Mother?"

By Ellen Schiff

by W. Anthony Gengareilly

On March 30, Professors Robert Bishoff and Ellen Schiff of the North Adams State College English Department delivered papers at the annual meeting of the Northeast Modern Language Association. I attended the Conference and heard the papers as an interested partisan. Both presentations dealt with fictional treatments of ethnic prototypes. Bishoff analyzed George Washington Cable's image of the Creole culture of antebellum New Orleans, while Schiff examined the changing perceptions of motherhood in some contemporary American literature.

Bishoff shared the platform with three others in a session titled Fictional Treatments of American History. Adroitly chaired by Lea Newman, also of the NASC English Department, this session launched into several themes dealing with the question of historical perspective--more specifically, how subjective understanding informs perception in interpreting the past. Bishoff's analysis of Cable's Old

Creole Days directed itself to this issue throughout.

After outlining the historical background of New Orleans's French-Spanish culture, Bishoff discussed Cable's portrayal of the flower of that culture--the Creole. A blend of French and Spanish stock, New Orleans Creoles have been characterized as "a race of fiery, spirited, chivalrous, cultured men and delicately beautiful, modest, and charmingly feminine women." According to Bishoff, Cable saw his Creoles in no such romantic light. Against the background of the rapid ascendancy and the even more rapid decline of French-Spanish influence in the "Big Easy" prior to 1840, Cable depicts his Creole figures as a "composite picture of decline, decadence and decay."

Bishoff attributed this atypical treatment to Cable's enduring feelings of guilt over slavery ("the act of trading in human beings"). The theme of slavery, Bishoff contended, is foremost in Old Creole Days (1879), even though it is specifically mentioned only once in the whole narrative. Yet, at the "very structural center" of the book, a Creole slave trader, Jean Poquelin, has a brother stricken with leprosy on a slaving expedition to the coast of Guinea. Here, then, is the cause underlying the book's theme of decadence, for, Bishoff concluded, "the ghost of Jean Poquelin and his leprous brother hang like an infectious shadow over all the work."

Even though Cable uses a real cultural type in an actual historical setting, his subjective feelings about slavery determine how the ethnic characters and historical theme are rendered. Coincidentally, Cable's northern literary contemporaries, Henry Adams and Henry James, also employ southern figures to render a moral judgment on society. In marked contrast to Cable, however, Adams in Democracy and James in The Bostonians treat their southern characters sympathetically as representatives of the Old South's genteel tradition and, thus, as important counterpoints to the crass materialism of the Gilded Age. Schiff's presentation, in a session titled

Women in Ethnic Literature, also demonstrated the influence of social values on the treatment of literary figures. In this case the feminist movement has colored the traditional image of the ethnic mother. Schiff commenced by contrasting the literary stereotype with contemporary images. Motherhood she observed has been the sole profession of the ethnic mother. "When it comes to establishing her sense of self and her personal dignity, the ethnic mother looks not into her mirror, but to her relationship with her family." Such is not the case, however, with the maternal characters in a number of books written in the last decade which "depict very different sorts of mothers, searchers for niche and identity, who neither seek nor find themselves in the realm of maternity."

Schiff then analyzed the personal and maternal struggles of three female characters: Brave Orchid, the subject of Maxine Hong Kingston's biography The Woman Warrior; Rivkeh Lev, the conflicted mother of Chaim Potok's novel My Name is Asher Lev; and Maya Angelou in her autobiography Gather Together In My Name. Schiff's description of each struggle is punctuated with dramatically effective declarations from her female heroes. Brave Orchid's daughter recalls that her mother told her she "would grow up a wife and a slave," but that she must cultivate defiance: "She taught me the song of the warrior woman. . . ." Rivkeh Lev is "trapped between two realms of meaning"--the ethos of traditional Judaism represented by her husband and the antithetical values of the art world as they have affected her son. Professionally trained, Rivkeh at one point decides to join her diplomat husband in Vienna over the protests of Asher, her artist son, to whom she responds: "You are not the only one in this family with special needs." Engulfed in a seemingly hopeless identity crisis, Maya Angelou, a teen-aged unwed mother, poignantly reflects on her infant son's affection: "While the total trust of a child can mold a parent into a new form, Guy's big smile . . . and happy disposition lost its magic to make me happy. He believed in me, but he was a child and I had lost belief in myself."

Ironically, Maya is finally aided in her search for herself by her own mother, whom she had previously rejected. Evidence of this sort leads Schiff to observe that traditional motherhood has not yet vanished from literature, that nurturing is still a vital concept and survives as an important redeeming quality in the image of maternity, however it may otherwise be reshaped. The "time-honored reflections of the mother as comforter and inspiration combine with the more iconoclastic images of mothers . . . to suggest that, although the ethnic mother's wardrobe may be infinitely larger and more varied than ever, she has not yet discarded her bedroom slippers." One can only hope that this summation holds, that social revolution will permit women to realize their full potential while leaving them free to continue to perform that essential, if previously exaggerated, task of mothering.

The day was exciting and profitable. Schiff's and Bishoff's elucidation of the profound influence of social evolution on literary perspective added, for me, a special dimension to the methodology of historical judgment.

CONTRIBUTORS

Robert Bence, Assistant Professor of History and Political Science, led a group of ten students to the Sudan in summer 1978 under the auspices of Crossroads/America.

W. Anthony Gengarelly, Assistant Professor of History and Political Science is a specialist in American civilization and literature.

Michael Haines, Assistant Professor of English, is a medievalist and a freelance journalist.

R. G. Vliet, a poet and novelist, tends his garden in Stamford, Vermont. His next book of poems will be brought out next year by Random House.

Drawing by Joe Magiera.